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ABSTRACT

A British project was conducted to improve understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of certification for work-based training and to analyze factors that influence the demand for accreditation. Three studies investigated what was happening in three employment sectors: tourism (service/commercial), social services (public administration), and the chemical industry (process manufacture). The methodology in each study involved a review of literature relevant to accreditation in general and to training in the employment sector and selection of the sample of individual employers. Employer data were obtained by interview, employee data by questionnaire with follow-up interviews. Respondents were as follows: tourism--30 employers, 35 employees, 0 employees interviewed; social services--30 employers, 122 employees, 30 employees interviewed; chemical--29 employers, 20 employees, 1 employee interviewed. Findings indicated that, for some jobs/skills, there was a commonly accepted form of training, sometimes accredited, sometimes not. Employers and employees found it difficult to say what added value accreditation gave or what benefit accreditation might give, if it was not. Benefits to the individual were as follows: transfer value/career advancement, mobility, job security, self-confidence, pride, job satisfaction, and personal fulfillment. Organizational benefits included the following: improved productivity and profitability, employee motivation, industrial relations, formation of a learning company, and management style. A taxonomy that classified the reasons for training was developed. Some disadvantages of accreditation were identified: the possibility of failure, cost and administration, time, and the consequences of raising the stakes. (YLB)

department of continuing education

ED 383 877

Accreditation of Employee Development

by John Geale

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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1 INTRODUCTION

In October 1992 the Office of Adult Continuing Education (as it then was) at Lancaster University, as part of a burgeoning research programme, established a number of projects on **accreditation** and on **work-based learning**. This part of that programme was funded by the Universities Funding Council (UFC) in 1992-93. It was conceived as a short, sharp initial study leading to further work in 1993-94. However, the new brief of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), which took over from the UFC, did not include money for CE research. The project remained broad-brush and exploratory, but had to be used as a foundation for more practical 'development' activities, rather than as a pilot for continuing research. This is referred to again in 5.14.

1.1 Objective

The principal aim of the project was to improve understanding of the advantages, and disadvantages, of work-based training being certificated. The project sought to analyse the factors which influence the demand for accreditation, looking separately at the employer and employee, but focusing particularly on the benefits to the employer.

Subsidiary objectives were to develop a simple taxonomy of types of education and training undertaken by people in work and to understand how each category was changing. Three contrasting sectors of employment were to be used, not to provide sectoral comparisons, but to check the conclusions against very different situations. Finally the project hoped to identify some deficiencies in the current opportunities for accredited training.

The investigation was intended to be entirely qualitative and did not attempt to measure the quantity of training, or what proportion carried an externally recognised qualification (i.e. was 'accredited').

1.2 Acknowledgments

Chapter 2, Methodology, will describe how three researchers investigated contrasting sectors of employment. Each has reported separately, using the common project methodology. I am extremely grateful to my two research colleagues, Alison Graddon and Mark Fowell, who undertook the first two investigations and who patiently accepted my guidance on the project's overall design.

This report seeks to bring together the findings from the three sectoral studies and to draw some general conclusions. The purpose of all four papers is to point to examples of how and why accreditation is developing so that:

- employers can better identify opportunities for using accreditation to help them to achieve their business objectives

- education and training providers, and award-making bodies, can be helped to respond to current deficiencies and anticipate future demands.

1.3 Constituent Studies

The three sectoral studies on the Accreditation of Employee Development had the following sub-titles:

- Tourism in North Lancashire and Cumbria, by Alison Graddon
- Lancashire Social Services, by Mark Fowell
- Chemical Industry in the NW of England, by John Geale.

1.4 Background

The assumption is sometimes made that the initiative for accreditation comes from its value to the employee, by adding to their marketability, and that employers who support it are hoping to buy employee motivation and goodwill. This scenario points to employer benefits such as improved recruitment, employee relations and productivity with reduced lost time, labour turnover, etc.

These particular factors would normally be expected to relate to the quality of the job and, therefore, to be more significant in jobs where the quality (in terms of pay, motivation or skill) was low, or where employees' loyalty was in question. The factors are also greatly affected by the economic situation and, although the employment sectors varied greatly, all were affected by recession.

Copies of all the above reports are available (at cost including p&p of £5; cheques should be made payable to Lancaster University) from Margaret Calder, Department of Continuing Education, The Storey Institute, Meeting House Lane, LANCASTER LA1 1TH; Tel 0524 849494

2. METHODOLOGY

The rationale of the research proposal was that growth in award-bearing employee development was attracting significant interest : with employers, professional organisations and in public policy. It stated that it would investigate what was happening, **and more importantly why**, in three employment sectors:

1 service/commercial
2 public administration
3 process manufacture

The particular sectors, within these broad categories, where chosen solely because of their importance to the region: **Tourism** in N Lancs and Cumbria, **Social Services** in Lancashire and **Chemical** manufacture in the Manchester, Merseyside, S Lancs and N Cheshire area.

They provided contrasting field studies which, coincidentally, had some common features.

- all three employment sectors felt they were the 'victims' of unprecedented **change:** tourism (markets), social services (restructuring, funding and legislation) and chemicals (technology and global factors)

- each had become more **accountable**, for instance, for health and safety and were needing to demonstrate due diligence in providing responsible care - for customers, clients and for the environment

- two, social services and chemicals, had a single Lead Body for National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and in all three a formal commitment to link training to NVQs had been made. NVQs were not, therefore, viewed with as much scepticism as elsewhere - though this does not mean that their acceptance was widespread!

- two of the sectors were comparatively homogenous, Social Services and Chemical Manufacture, and all three had some overarching co-ordination, or industry network.

Tourism subdivided into three: hotels, accommodation and packaged holidays; visitor attractions; and local authorities with tourism responsibilities. Co-ordination and training networks were provided by the Tourist Boards and, to a lesser extent, the FE colleges and private training providers.

Social Services subdivided into four: Purchasing Teams; Provider-Adult Services; Provider-Childrens' Services; and Support Services. They were all part of a single Authority (Lancashire Social Services) and under one Industry Lead Body, the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work (CCETSW).

Chemical Manufacture was a mix of companies, all within the Chemical Industries Association and the Chemical Industry Training Organisation. Networking was provided through these and via the FE Colleges who provided training services.

2.1 Empirical investigation

The methodology was the same in each of the three studies:

- A review of literature relevant to accreditation in general and to training in the particular employment sector. This was used primarily as background to the employer interviews.

- Selection of the sample of individual employers. This was always pragmatic and biased towards those who were interested in training and accreditation.

The research was designed to be of **mutual benefit** to those employers and employees being investigated, as well as to the investigators.

- **Employer data** was obtained by interview

- **Employee data** by questionnaire, with follow-up interviews to a self-selected sub-group

The numbers involved in each field study were -

	Employer Interviews (target 30)	Employee completed questionnaire (target 100)	Employee Interviews (target 30)
Tourism	**30**	35	Nil
Social Services	**30**	122	30
Chemicals	**29**	20	1

Two research instruments were designed prior to the first field study and used in each investigation.

Employer benefits (of accreditation). A schedule of questions and headings for conducting a semi-structured interview lasting about an hour (in practice some were as short as 30 mins - typically in tourism, while others continued for up to two hours).

Employee benefits (of accreditation). A confidential questionnaire to be handed to selected employees by their employer and returned direct to the University in a pre-paid envelope.

The core of the work was the 89 employer interviews. In each of the three studies, the sectoral report was circulated to each employer who had participated and any changes which were suggested were incorporated.

2.2 Time-table

	1992						1993					
	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct
Literature search and questionnaire design												
Tourism fieldwork (2½ months)												
Social Services fieldwork (3½ months)												
Chemical fieldwork (2 months)												

The project funding was for the academic year 1992/93 and the schedule was determined by the availability of p/t researchers and the requirements of the industries. For instance, the tourism fieldwork had to be undertaken after the New Year and before the Easter seasons (i.e. between late January and early April).

2.3 Methodological Problems

There was a major problem in teasing out the **separate** contributions (to employers and to employees) of training, assessment and of certification. The latter two being:

- accreditation **process**, involving the setting of agreed learning goals, assessment and feedback to the learner (and to the employer)

- accreditation **outcomes**, in terms of a nationally recognised certificate, or record of achievement, which by definition has 'transfer value'.

Training , without assessment/accreditation, can be difficult to recognise. Unless specific knowledge or competences are specified, attention tends to be diverted to training **activities**, as opposed to training **outcomes.** Less attention is given to learning on, and through, the job. It was only possible to enquire about what employers did and why. All discussions started with 'training' and both employers and employees had difficulty separating out the **added value** of assessment, or accreditation.

A further problem with the methodology was the reliance placed on employers to distribute the employee questionnaire. In only one study was this fully successful and even here it was a central training function, and not the local 'employers', that used its influence to target employees direct.

3 CONTEXT

This section refers, briefly, to some general issues against which the findings in chapter 4 need to be set.

The traditions for recruiting training and career development in the three sectors are very different, with tourism being the one about which it is most difficult to generalise.

3.1 Tourism

Historically the industry has a poor image regarding pay, training and career prospects. It is starting to shake off this image - partly as other industries decline (making even poorer quality jobs in tourism comparatively more attractive) and as more rewarding jobs within the industry have developed.

Accredited training has existed for a long time, but has not been closely linked to career progression, where managers have tended to be either owners, or to have risen through the ranks. The industry demands a practical 'hands on' approach and the older staff are the least likely to have any vocational qualifications. In some sectors it is possible to encounter an 'Alice-in-Wonderland world' in which unlikely people can be found in all sorts of jobs : highly qualified people in manual jobs and visa versa.

Increased professionalism, and competition, are very noticeable; particularly in the public sector and larger private organisations. Award-bearing courses in tourism have become very popular, especially with younger people, and many of the larger groups are making strenuous efforts to move from high turnover, casual staff to a more stable and better trained workforce. The industry is further complicated by the crucial importance of some skills which are only loosely linked to accredited training; such as local knowledge and the ability to smile!

3.2 Social Services

This sector is highly professionalised, with strong expectations that managerial and professional social work staff will be qualified. Senior posts have tended to be held by staff with social work qualifications (CQSW, CSS or, recently, DipSW) with a few adding, or even substituting, management qualifications. This contrasts with large numbers of care and auxilliary staff who have, in the past, required no formal qualifications and who have been a lower priority (than professional social workers) for in-service training. Services for the young and for those with special needs are more likely to employ qualified staff than services for the elderly; with residential homes (for both children and elderly) being the 'Cinderella'.

The transfer of some responsibilities from health to social services, in order to provide care in the community, has involved some transfer of staff with nursing qualifications. Recent changes in public expectations, accountability and in legislation have created enormous demands of, and for, training - at all levels - with significant funding from central government. Another factor has been the very rapid expansion of private residential provision, often competing on price and with a lower commitment to training. The greater accountability, and cost, of the local authority's Social Services

Department means that, corporately, its mission is a high quality service and, individually, there is awareness of constant re-organisation and threat to jobs. The qualification and promotion structure of Social Services is still strongly linked to generic, professional social work qualifications.

3.3 Chemical Manufacture

Companies within the sector vary, but there has been a common pattern of organisation and employment, set by the dominant large companies. Not so long ago this was highly stratified, with most jobs having well defined qualification requirements: 'manual' workers operating the plant, 'technicians' servicing it and monitoring quality and 'professional' engineers, scientists and managers in the senior jobs. The greatest changes have been at the lower levels, where multi-skilling and upgrading plant operators has accompanied massive reductions in staffing levels and the creation, in effect, of a new class of 'plant technician'.

3.4 Changes in Education and Employment

With participation in higher education increasing, it is unsurprising that the research found that some highly qualified people (e.g. graduates) had found their way into a wide range of job which had no tradition of employing qualified staff. In tourism and social services this was often via temporary, or casual, employment. The chemical industry, in contrast to the other two sectors, being capital intensive, was able to pay staff in the lower grades salaries similar to some of the 'managers' in the other two sectors. Chemicals was, in a number of ways, the odd one out. It was the one sector which had suffered significant redundancy, while the other two had expanded, (though individual tourism employers had gone under). Also, the high turnover of less skilled staff in tourism and Social Services - and their use of part-time, predominantly female, casual staff - contrasts with, say, plant operators who were an all male, stable group (before the current changes).

It is worth repeating that all three sectors have experienced unprecedented change : changes in their markets, structure and technology. All three sectors are of increasing importance to the economy of the region, eventhough the number directly employed by the chemical manufacturers has dramatically declined. All three have also experienced structural change, with specialist services developing, or being hived off.

3.5 Financial Support for Training

Training, and the accreditation of training, are determined by, and themselves reflect, corporate financial policy and - in some cases - public financial policy. Two of the sectors were substantially influenced by the use of public funds for training. In the case of tourism, via the local TECs and, in Social Services, from central government.

In each of the three sectoral studies strenuous attempts were made to find out what training budgets existed, who controlled them, the criteria for their use and how much of the real training expenditure was planned, ad hoc - or met by the employee. The findings were complicated and, therefore, not easily summarised, other than to stress their crucial importance. The recession had adversely affected training budgets in

tourism, though special factors in the other two sectors had tended to protect them. They impinge on two other findings: the key significance of supervisory and middle management (especially where they control a devolved budget) and the significant resource which individuals will, in the right circumstances, invest in their own training. These, and the other findings, are described in the next chapter.

4 FINDINGS

This section does not seek to repeat all the findings listed in the three sectoral reports, but rather to re-organise selected data by theme, rather than by employment sector.

The principal objective (1.1) was to describe key changes in training in each of the three sectors, looking specifically at accreditation and at its benefits - to employers and to employees. Yet much of the data related to factors influencing the demand for training; irrespective of whether it was certificated, or not. This was for a number of reasons. There were only a few examples of training with 'accreditation' as an optional extra, so it was difficult to compare the benefits of training with, and without, certification. Secondly, NVQs were at a very early stage. Some NVQ standards had been agreed in all three sectors: for some three years in chemicals and social services and, more recently, in tourism. Despite the highly selective sample of employers, it was only in the chemical industry that a significant number, so far, had assessed staff to NVQ standards - though many more were preparing to do so.

For some jobs/skills there was a commonly accepted form of training, sometimes accredited, sometimes not. In such cases, employers and employees found it difficult to say what **added** value accreditation gave (if the accepted form was certificated), or what benefit accreditation might give, if it was not. But there were no such inhibitions about describing the benefits of training. Some of these are given in the following sections and the specific advantages, or disadvantages, of accreditation are given in the final conclusions (Chapter 5). A subsidiary objective was to develop a simple taxonomy of training. This is given in 4.10 and provides further background to the analysis of the benefits of accreditation in the final chapter.

4.1 Organisational Benefits and Individual Expectations

Fear lay behind many of the organisational reasons for training, whether accredited or not. This investigation took place during a fairly fearful time in 1993, with increasing unemployment, competition and restructuring (particularly in the public sector). All three employment sectors had become more aware of, and positive about, the **need** for training. Whatever difficulties they were having meeting this need, they were all seeking greater **professionalism** and **flexibility** from their staff. Indeed, these two words characterised the whole enquiry.

The organisations visited were seeking hard-nosed, value-for-money benefits. But the organisations represented very different traditions. In each sector there was a lower strata of jobs in which training had been basic, initial and unsustained. This layer, however, extended higher in some sectors than in others. Training and 'professionalism' were closely related; established professional groups (e.g. Social Workers) having the highest realistic expectations of receiving training throughout their working lives. Organisations were clear about their corporate need for training, but often uncertain, even nervous, about changing individual expectations.

It has already been emphasised that all three sectors were experiencing unprecedented **change**. Training, at least in the larger organisations, was seen as a key means of achieving this. There were some interesting contrasting, and even conflicting, findings.

- There were examples of organisations rediscovering the benefits of employing older people, yet such people were the least likely to want training - certainly accredited training - and the most likely to be set in their ways.

- The extension of 'professionalism' to lower level jobs in an organisation requires staff to stay long enough to be trained and to repay that investment. But employers, particularly in tourism, were unsure whether training would encourage loyalty or poaching.

- Some organisations were conscious of their poor career prospects and were nervous of raising expectations which they would not be able to meet. Other organisations were focusing on their corporate requirements to the exclusion, for the time being at least, of facing individual expectations.

- The need for greater productivity (more good quality work, with fewer people) was too often starting with job losses, which then meant that the remaining staff were too stretched to undertake the training needed to increase productivity (though this was not typical of the chemical industry).

Fear (whether of competition or of changes in government policy), lack of a learning culture and scarce resources were all tending to focus attention on the **immediate** needs with each person's job. This is referred to again under 'Appraisal' in 4.4. Training staff to their full potential, if referred to at all, was not much evident - though there were great contrasts between low and high pay industries, between large and small organisations and between low grade and senior jobs.

The language used by respondents representing employers in all sectors was commercial : training needed to be 'business-like', 'value-for-money' and 'competition'. Yet the feelings being expressed were those of the professions : 'provide quality service' and 'individual responsibility'. Training, in commerce, is top down; in the professions it is bottom up. Few of the employers, with some significant exceptions, were empowering individuals to be genuinely 'professional'.

4.2 Employer Support for Training

The sectoral reports each seek to show both the **material** support given to employees to train and help in providing **information** and guidance. These were investigated in relation to subsequent employee development, after initial/basic training (or additional essential training to meet statutory requirements, etc).

4.2.1 Money and time for training

Public money tends to be used, selectively, in areas of greatest need and not to replace private money. Substantial government funding was available for training in social services and less substantial funding, but still significant, was available in tourism from various public agencies. The chemical industry was less dependent on public resources (and any adoption, therefore, of NVQs was likely to be for their inherent qualities and

not in response to pressure from government). This section refers to how funding, public or private, was made available to staff by their employer.

All the previous caveats about large and small companies, high and low level jobs, etc. apply and this makes generalisations difficult and dangerous. And some of the issues relate to traditional attitudes, which are also referred to in the next section on Trade Unions. The employer budgets used to pay fees for employee-initiated training, if they existed at all, were unlikely to be devolved to operational units and continued to be held centrally. All three industries reported many examples of fees being met by the employer, normally in full. All distinguished between training for the job and training for personal development, though the line distinguishing the two was drawn in different ways.

The lack of negotiation on the level of financial support for fees and other expenses seemed to tie in with inadequate dialogue between individuals and their managers and the poor use of appraisal procedures to discuss training and development. Fees tended to be paid according to rules, or precedents. There were examples in some of the tourism companies, for instance, of formal requirements to repay fees if an employee resigned too soon; though it was not clear how this would be implemented. Tourism was, perhaps, the most vulnerable of the industries investigated and the least exposed to training. Of the three sectors, it was the least supportive of training for qualifications, by those in their employment, unless such qualifications were thought to be essential.

The tourism industry was very supportive, as was social services, of students seeking work experience. This was an additional way that some 'material support for training' was given - and with less disturbance to the rotas, or expectations, of existing staff. There were examples of students being deliberately used to introduce new skills (e.g. computing) and other instances where the development of existing staff had benefited from students coming in on placement.

There were examples, particularly in social services, where fee support was being linked to NVQs (mainly at levels 1 & 2, but also at higher levels and at level 5 in Management). It is, of course, the policy of TECs to link funding to NVQ accreditation wherever possible - though the examples in social services were not linked to TEC funding. It was the general funding that organisations held their training budgets centrally and used them to meet organisational, and not national, priorities.

4.2.2 Information on training

Employers in all three sectors claimed to be bombarded with information on training : from their professional and trade associations, training providers, TECs and from specialist journals and local networks. But there were often difficulties, reported by many employees, in disseminating this information. There were complaints of inadequate communication and guidance.

Senior staff in all three sectors were the least likely to lack information or guidance on training. Two sectors, tourism and social services, reported that their difficulties in communicating to, and advising, more junior staff were aggrevated by the use of part-time and casual employees and by consequent high turnover. All three sectors had additional communication problems due to shift working.

The survey of employee experience in all three sectors showed that employers were perceived, by their staff, as being better at giving support with training fees, than with training guidance. This tied in with their dissatisfaction with appraisal. Employers appeared to be better at reacting to requests for training support, than at initiating offers - particularly in relation to lower level jobs. An exception to this was plant operator training in the chemical industry.

4.3 Trade Unions

Some of the most progressive of the employers visited had recognised a need to develop a **shared ownership** of their training programmes - particularly if these were accredited. Yet the unions were either non-existent, weak or not interested in training. Indeed, at least one company had felt the need to create a representative body to fill this vacuum.

In the past, the unions have used qualifications as a peg on which to hang pay. This tendancy was found to persist. If an employer was known to be encouraging staff to gain qualifications, unions were likely to see this as an opportunity for increased pay. Employers, on the other hand, were saying that all employees must be competent to do their current job and that qualifications, when an optional extra, were for personal satisfaction or improved career prospects.

Employers rarely, it seemed, had effective unions with whom to talk; and, where there were, did not have a common language. This could even work against the union's own aspirations for their members. For instance, in social services some auxilliary staff (mainly female and part-time) were being impeded in gaining NVQ qualifications, through lack of assessment opportunities, which might have enabled them to move into higher quality jobs.

4.4 Training Provision and Training Outcomes

All three sectors have long traditions of offering training in selected jobs; those jobs which are particularly critical, or have professional standing. Each industry was seeking to extend their tradition - both downwards and sideways. But not necessarily by using traditional means.

It was extremely difficult, during the investigation, to discuss 'training' in terms of its outcomes, rather than as a process (involving specific 'training' events). This is discussed further in 4.6 (Assessment and Accreditation) and in the final chapter (Conclusions). But this does not mean that the training process was not changing. In all three sectors there was a great deal of awareness of the increasing variety of training activities: external courses, in-house courses and open learning. There was

less explicit understanding of the ways in which learning can be deliberately achieved without these, even though some techniques, such as job rotation, were common.

The use of external courses was continuing to grow, though the tendency was for them to be shorter and more flexible. Such post-initial courses could be for more advanced, specialist training or for complementary skills, such as computing, languages or managment. They were seen as providing valuable contacts, networks and **benchmarking**, as well as skills and knowledge. 'Benchmarking' requires looking outwards for standards within the industry on which to set one's sights.

There was also a need to internalise training. Many practical considerations were leading larger organisations to make more use of in-house courses and or open, or flexible, learning (supported by resources in the work place). this was seen as both cost effective and as a way of **integrating** work and training. This was particularly true of NVQs, where the need to determine standards for assessment was also being used as an opportunity to improve how the job was done. And how the internal standards, and operating procedures, were communicated to **all** staff (not just those being assessed). Even on non-assessed internal course (and these were the vast majority) the benefits of integrating training and work were constantly being stressed.

Both tourism and social services were actively recruiting staff - something of a rarity today in the chemical industry. It can be a temptation to buy-in new skills, using recruitment, rather than to train existing staff. This was specifically referred to in the tourism report. Tourism and the chemical industry had examples of another characteristic : companies which were pan-European. Training in such companies was likely to be to a European standard (often higher) and involving job rotation, mentoring, assessment and appraisal - as well as off-the-job 'courses'.

4.5 Appraisal

Staff appraisal schemes were common in the large organisations in all three sectors. It was rare for there not to be a scheme for senior and middle managers and in a small number of progressive organisations this was being extended downwards - in some instances to all employees. Schemes were not always being implemented and few were functioning to their full potential. If they were, they would link appraisal with training; identifying individual training needs, formulating a development plan, giving information and guidance and monitoring progress (unless separate mentoring arrangements were available). Most employers said that appraisal was failing to do these things adequately and this was confirmed by the employee questionnaires.

Even in the chemical industry, which in many ways had achieved the greatest changes and had the best example of 'Learning Companies', staff appraisal was generally felt to need extending and improving. This was an important finding and has particular significance for accredited training. Section 4.2 referred to centrally controlled training budgets and how these were often being used to support individuals on award-bearing courses. But ineffectual appraisal was being blamed for :

(i) failure of adequate information on training opportunities reaching all staff,
(ii) the inability of some staff to assess their own potential

(iii) the disillusion of some staff in those (large) organisations whose public declarations on employee development were not being implemented in full.

Training, and particularly accredited training, was claimed to 'switch staff on'. Appraisal is also a switch. It is a highly charged, and dangerous area, involving as it does esteem and regard. It is not surprising, therefore, that so many organisations reported that their managers found it difficult to handle.

National Vocational Qualifications could, of course, help to change this - or be part of a 'competency movement' which is instrumental in creating the right sort of environment in which individuals can be critically assessed **and** supported to succeed. Some line-managers will also be NVQ assessors. On-the-job assessment will certainly be required. If this is rigorous, and if the learning environment is supportive and positive, more managers will develop the skills, and the inclination, to exploit appraisal schemes as a major opportunity for employee development.

Before considering assessment and accreditation in more detail, just a footnote on 'Investors in People'. This government initiative offers companies standards to aim for which fall short of the ideals described above; though these standards were felt to be unnecessarily demanding by some of the organisations visited, particularly in tourism. The standards do not necessarily require companies to 'empower' staff to take more initiative in, and for, their own development; though this may be implied. IiP is certainly 'strategic' and should be welcomed. But some of the organisations in this survey with the strongest commitment to, and standards in, training did not feel excited to participate. Perhaps this is as it should be; why have a scheme aimed at those who are already successful? That is, of course, unless it is an appraisal scheme.

4.6 Assessment and Accreditation

The advantages, and disadvantages, of accreditation are summarised in the next chapter. This section refers to two distinctions made in the sectoral reports. The first separates assessment and accreditation and the second concerns the initiator of the training; the employee or the employer.

Section 1.4 drew attention to the exchange value of qualifications to employees seeking, say, promotion, transfer - or just improved job security. These characteristics were confirmed in this study, including in the discussions with employers, yet they were all **increasing** opportunities for accreditation. Before looking at the reason, it is necessary to repeat the caveat that it was often difficult to separate the added value of accreditation, from the general benefits of training.

In section 4.4 training was referred to as a process which led to certain outcomes. Employers, it seemed, were not interested in the accreditation **outcomes**, but in the accreditation **process** (whereas the employee was more interested in the accreditation outcome). The process of accrediting training involves specifying (even agreeing) learning goals, assessment and feedback - and, ultimately, some form of certification. This process could be followed stopping short of certification. In a few cases it did. But very little of the unaccredited training was formally assessed and this points to the first reason for employer interest.

The second is about who initiates - or, more accurately, who owns - the training. There were examples of both employers and employees taking the initiative, but it was clear from the follow-up questionnaires that **all** employees felt they 'owned' training which was accredited, whoever had instigated it. This feeling of ownership was enhanced when the qualification was optional and not a requirement of the employee's current job.

Employers were found to be most likely to be taking the lead in respect of previously unqualified staff. It seemed they felt less pressure to actively encourage, say, professional engineers or social workers to do an NVQ, at level 4 or 5, in management. Though most employers were supporting such requests, if made. There were also differences between the employment sectors.

Employers in the tourism sector, where there were of course more small organisations, seemed generally to be the least likely to take the lead in suggesting accredited training for existing staff. Such generalisations are extremely crude, but the chemical industry seemed to be at the other end of this scale. The latter's interest seemed to come from a number of factors:

- highly capitally intensive industry
- reorganisation and multi-skilling
- need to break down distinctions between traditional staff grades (e.g. manual, technician, technologist)
- stable labour force (little risk of 'poaching')
- 'benchmarking' against the best European, and international, performance standards
- high level of professional competence from existing management

4.7 Quality and Management Style

Each of the sectors was striving to provide high quality products, or services, oriented to their customers' (clients') needs. And none of the organisations were impervious to the economic and social pressures to adopt a 'flatter' organisation structure and a more participative management style. These two characteristics, though driven by different imperatives, contributed to many of the same findings : that employers were consciously seeking, through training and accreditation, to enter into fuller relationships with their staff. They were consciously (or unconsciously) showing, and seeking, greater commitment. 'Quality' is referred to in the sectoral report on the chemical industry as the one issue central to both the 'hard' (bottom line) benefits of accreditation and to the 'soft' (personal fulfillment) benefits. Accreditation, and the commitment to develop staff to their full potential, is equally relevant to changes in management style.

Each sector had identified a need to more fully recognise the importance of **all** staff and, most significantly, those on the lower grades. Though this need was not always

recognised by middle management - hence some of the problems. Internal communication was criticised by interviewees in each of the sectors. Some of the larger organisations were using the introduction of, say, NVQs as opportunities to rewrite their training manuals/operating procedures to ensure greater consistency, higher standards - and improved quality. Smaller organisations were more likely to be, for instance, rotating staff to increase flexibility and improve motivation. Some of these initiatives were established and more were planned. The link between trusting employees to take more responsibility for their own work - especially quality - and taking responsibility ('ownership') for managing their own training was very rarely made explicit.

4.8 Deficiencies in the Current Situation

Many of the respondents, both employers and employees, were clear about things which should be improved; yet they sometimes picked opposite characteristics. For instance, some felt that traditional award-bearing courses were too 'academic', while others regretted their replacement by more 'practical' qualifications.

There was general agreement that traditional, external courses were not sufficiently tuned to the needs of employed staff in their content and availability. Many different factors were blamed for the lack of appropriate, external training : public funding, poor awareness of industry's needs, or inadequacies in the trainers themselves. But as well as grumbles there were plaudits. There were clearly some very good links between practitioners and training providers in all three sectors and there was some very innovative training provision. The use of open learning, and the provision of in-company training support by FE colleges, were two examples.

Most of the criticism, not surprisingly, concerned NVQs; despite, or perhaps because of, each of the three sectors being **comparatively** advanced in their introduction. (General awareness of NVQs is still poor, so this comparison is with a low standard). Criticism concerned the inherent difficulties of creating qualifications which are **both** transferable and relevant; which offer progression while recognising local requirements. They were, at times, criticised for demanding inappropriate, underpinning knowledge and, at other times, for being insufficiently rigorous.

Even in those industries where NVQs were comparatively advanced, there were only one or two years experience of NVQ assessment and accreditation. So it is not surprising that there were difficulties, particularly bearing in mind that the costs are so heavily 'front loaded (Chapter 5). In tourism and social services the NVQ movement seemed to be supply-led and, in as much as demand was increasing, reflected the success of NVQs.

There was stronger evidence in the chemical industry that there was a conscious demand-led movement. The sectoral report mentions, for instance, companies which were exploring alternative competence-based qualifications and even inventing ones of their own.

4.9 Motivation for Accreditation

There was no doubt that most of the employers interviewed expected more training to become accredited; in whichever industry, or at whatever level. There was less clarity about the reasons for this. The 'accreditation movement' is gaining momentum from both the availability of new qualifications and provision (predominently NVQs) and from growing awareness by some employers of the benefits to themselves. The movement, as stated in the previous section (4.8) is part supply and part demand led, helped by a changing climate of opinion and by public funding. Accreditation was increasingly being seen 'as a good thing' and as an indicator of open-minded and progressive employers - but without an analysis of the benefits. Part of the motivation from employers was, therefore, to be seen to be supporting this trend and was often at the insistence of senior management.

The role of training professionals, often employed at a more modest middle-management level, seemed also to be extremely significant. Their professional bodies are closely linked to the Industry Lead Body for NVQ accreditation in training and development. Training officers, in companies using NVQ standards, had a pivotal role in creating the documentation, training the assessors, calling for information and in helping line managers throughout the organisation to cope with the 'process'. Not since the heady industrial relations days in the 1960s can specialists within the personnel function have impinged so strongly on the day-to-day operation of their organisations.

Extending accreditation to more training, and to more employees, was clearly involving a great deal of work. This was not resisted by specialist trainers because, by and large, they saw it as a more 'professional' way of achieving excellence, contributing to change and of promoting individual development. But NVQ, and competence-based qualifications, had had an additional consequence. They had provided a mechanism, and an **authority**, for personnel specialists to contribute effectively to operational managment. There was, for instance, an example of a personnel manager being given responsibility for quality.

The introduction of NVQs, and their incorporation into government policy and into TEC funding, was clearly influencing some industries and some organisations. Most particularly those who were anxious to please public agencies. This motivation, though highly political, seemed not to be partisan. All colours of the political spectrum seem to be equally keen to 'empower' individuals to develop their own potential. This is the emphasis of the National Education and Training Targets, of national education and training policies for a more competitive Britain and for the Investors in People initiative. It seemed also to be the wish of enlightened shareholders and of local authorities which had no allegiance what-so-ever to the policy of central government.

The benefits of accreditation, both 'hard' and 'soft' were rarely the primary motivation for introducing training **processes**, of which accreditation was a part; though there were exceptions. These include some of the basic skills jobs, of which chemical plant operators were a prime example. but the benefits which, in retrospect, seemed to have accrued were considerable and before listing them in the next chapter it is worth describing the classification of jobs (taxonomy) which both informed the employer interviews and was refined as a consequence of them.

4.10 Taxonomy of Training

Sections 1.2 (Acknowledgements) and 2.1 (Empirical Investigations) describe how three investigators developed a common methodology and common interview schedule. To assist in this, it was helpful to agree a common taxonomy, classifying the reasons for training. These reasons are separate from who initiated it (employer or employee)

taxonomy of training needs

	REACTIVE	**PROACTIVE**
Level 1 **Individual**	**• to counter deficiencies in current job performance** **• to counter flagging morale**	• to prepare for career progression • to increase job satisfaction • for personal development • to counter disadvantage
Level 2 **Organisational**	• in order to adapt to (involuntary) change (e.g. new technology, products, markets) • to make unavoidable organisational changes (e.g. takeover)	**• to prepare for (voluntary) change (e.g. new technology, products, markets)** **• for flexibility and multi-skilling** **• to raise standards/increase productivity** **• to introduce a new management organisation/style. Develop a learning culture** **• to facilitate new recruitment and/or new HRD policies**
Level 3 **Community/Environment**	**• to respond to changed markets/customer needs** **• to comply with new legislation** **• as a consequence of a changed labour market**	• to become a more responsible employer - by contributing to the community/environment - by creating more equal opportunities - by preparing staff for redundancy

Individual needs (level 1) and community needs (level 3) clearly translate into organisational needs (level 2). Yet they were perceived diffently. Most audits of training needs specified **reactive** elements at the individual and community levels and **proactive** elements at the organisational level. In other words, it seemed to be more acceptable for training at the individual level to be 'remedial'.

People, as well as organisations, are in constant change. An audit of training needs must be against anticipated change within a given time-frame and of a vision of the future. The simple taxonomy helped in the research to relate each example of training to how, when and where the particular training needs were expected to arise.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter seeks to answer the **principal** objective described in 1.1, to further understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of work-based training being certificated, focusing particularly on the benefits to the employer.

It must be stressed that the use of such accreditation, in all three sectors, was low; but in all three it was increasing. Each had long traditions of award-bearing initial training leading to jobs where qualifications were the norm. This was particularly true in social services and the chemical industry. Such qualifications might involve practical experience, but were not essentially 'work-based'. Indeed, the accreditation of work-based learning, including those employees on external courses, was sometimes so low that it was difficult to collect data. This was emphasised in the tourism sectoral report.

It is common in all industries to find a high concentration of education and training in a section of the workforce and among a proportion of employers. In this study, attention was concentrated on those jobs, and employers, where accreditation was being extended. There was no shortage of employers who were very aware of training issues and keen to participate in a project in which these would be explored, for mutual benefit.

The benefits of accreditation were looked at separately for employers and for employees, but there was **no** evidence that a gain to one was at a loss to the other (e.g. an employee advancing their career at the expense of their employer). However, it is impossible to know how this might have been different in a stronger employment market. But employers seemed to be looking for somewhat different benefits in the three sectors.

Tourism organisations seemed to be the most afraid of 'poaching' and felt the least able to make the up-front investment in, say, NVQ accreditation. Where companies were sponsoring staff on external, certificated courses it was likely to be for essential requirements, or specifically to reward success and encourage loyalty. Nearly all the examples were employee-initiated.

Social Services was similar to tourism in that it was providing personal services and used large numbers of low paid staff. But there were also differences. Social Services were not afraid of 'poaching' and were less inhibited in seeking to enhance the competence and commitment of care staff. They were more aware of some of the personal benefits to the employee, such as confidence building, and of their public accountability. Many of the initiatives were employer-led.

Chemical Industry was, in some ways, the most interesting as it was the least affected by public agencies and their funding. It was primarily looking for the hard-nose, bottom-line benefits mentioned in the tourism survey, but with more appreciation of the 'soft' benefits, which were emphasized in Social Services.

Such benefits might be characterised as follows:

	Benefits	
	HARD	**SOFT**
Individual Level		
	Transfer value/career advancement, mobility, job security	Self-confidence, pride, job satisfaction, personal fulfilment.
Organisational Level		
	Improved productivity (and quality) profitability	Employee motivation, industrial relations, learning company, management style (and quality)
Community Level		
	more skilled and flexible labour force	'Learning Society'

This analysis says more than 'organisations are seeking to be more successful by training their staff', it points to a subtler link between training and success - and how training, enhanced by accreditation - was thought to be doing this. The remaining paragraphs deal with the **added value** (or cost) of **accreditation**, with the emphasis always on the employer.

5.1 Structure and Quality of Training

The **process** of assessment and accreditation was described in 4.6. The added value, to the employer, was the process and not the outcome. It threw up inconsistencies in working practices and gave **structure** to the training. Competence-based assessment often contributed to the organisation of work, as well as to communication and feed-back on performance. It fitted well with management policies concerned with participation, communication (both horizontally and vertically), quality and customer care.

5.2 Standards

Accredited training, whether NVQ or external certificated course, encourages individuals - and their organisations - to measure themselves against national standards. It helps organisations to 'benchmark' their standards and to seek consistency. It is a guard, but not a guarantee, against complacency.

5.3 Signalling

Organisations which were promoting training to national standards were giving signals both internally and externally. For some, the 'kitemark' to customers was important

(e.g. Blue Badge Guides in tourism) or as part of achieving BS 5750. Of greater importance to many of the organisations, however, was the signal that it gave to their own staff.

5.4 Management of Change

Accreditation was being used to effect change in two ways, both related to 'empowerment'. It always gave greater ownership of the training to the individual and sometimes, as with NVQs, gave them more responsibility for managing their own training. This transfer of responsibility downwards was exactly the change which many organisations were wishing to make in their management. But it was not happening without great effort. It was often mentioned that staff had not easily taken responsibility for their own training, but this difficulty should be set against the potential gain (and other benefits, such as 5.5 and 5.6 below).

Care staff in Social Services and plant operators in the chemical industry are just two examples of how accreditation was being used to assist in the implementation of change : to enhance the competence, and status, of lower level staff who had become critical to the organisation's success. A derivative of this was the way accreditation was sometimes being used to emphasise the importance of 'complementary skills' (e.g. languages, computing, management).

Accreditation adds to the training investment (either initially, or in terms of risk) and was being used to focus attention on key activities central to implementing change.

5.5 Diagnostic Training

Only training which is objectively assessed provides good quality information of further training needs and on individual potential. Many organisations making increased use of accreditation were:

(i) surprised by the proportion of staff volunteering; it was more popular than the training professionals had expected

(ii) showed that there was a pool of untapped ability (which did not surprise the professionals).

5.6 Shared Investment

Personal 'ownership' of training was found to effect commitment and the willingness of individuals to take responsibility for learning and for **resourcing that learning**. There had been assumptions in all three sectors that all employer-initiated training would be at the employers' expense and in the employers' time. There were numerous examples of individuals being prepared to put in very significant amounts of their own time to achieve qualifications offered by their employer, even when there were no obvious 'hard' benefits to the individual. This conclusion has two implications : more employers should recognise the time that individuals are prepared to invest and more employers should negotiate sharing the investment. It was common for requests by employees for support (4.2) to be met, or rejected, in full. Negotiation would seem

appropriate and to fit well with an effective appraisal system (4.5).

5.7 Accountability

Some examples of accredited training came from jobs where there was public accountability; where doing the job correctly - and being seen to be qualified - were critical. Obvious examples are in food hygiene, child protection and environmental control. This was not always framed in legislation, as in the requirements for driving a vehicle, though legislation was a potent influence. This is another aspect of accreditation where there is likely to be an increasing 'European' dimension.

5.8 Good Habits

Defence against bad habits was a more obvious motivator for, and benefit of, accreditation than the adoption of good ones. Such is life : fear of immediate penalty is often more compelling than the promise of long term reward. Yet the potency of accreditation to motivate staff to become 'life-long learners' is known. It has been shown to stimulate interest in acquiring further qualifications and, more importantly, to stimulate interest. The self-confidence and satisfaction engendered by certificated learning was evidenced, in this study, as leading to a habit of further enquiry and learning. Once 'switched on' learners tended to be changed, and brighter, even when the assessment had been completed.

5.9 Flexibility

The 'hard' and 'soft' benefits often overlapped and this was certainly the case in training for flexibility. The 'hard' benefit came from multi-skilling; from training staff to be competent (i.e. skilled and knowledgeable) to undertake certain generic tasks, assessed to national standards. This extended their skills and made them more transferable.

The 'softer' benefits came from changes in attitude to work. Just as 'learning organisations' are defined as being responsive to change, so are learning individuals. When the training process had been done well (and had involved assessment and feedback) staff were thought to be more likely to initiate, and respond to, change.

5.10 Equal Opportunities

Previous sections have referred to the well known under-achievement of many adults. This applies particularly to some 'disadvantaged' workers (using this term broadly to include categories of age, gender, race, handicap, etc). Qualifications can be used to attempt to counter this, but there was no evidence of this happening in this particular investigation. Indeed, some work-based learning opportunities were least available to some categories of 'disadvantaged' staff, such as part-time workers. Yet these were sometimes prime examples of 'non-traditional' learners who would benefit most from this type of opportunity.

5.11 Efficiency

The cost of training, and the additional cost of accreditation, were clearly critical. Cost was the most frequently mentioned 'disadvantage' of accreditation (see 5.13 below). Yet the **real** costs were rarely measured. To be effective, training must achieve its objectives; to be efficient, it should do this at minimum real cost.

Accreditation is always costly. On external courses it may involve fees, student time, reports, coaching (mentoring) and planning and supervising assessed project work. On competence-based internal training, such as NVQs, there is even greater emphasis on assessment; but in this case it tended to involve a **transfer of resources** from training to assessment. Training was confined to specific activities, or knowledge, which were not yet up to the standards set. This **targetting** of resources was claimed to be increasing efficiency, though the initial high costs of introducing NVQ assessment made it difficult to substantiate this claim in the first few years. (And none of the organisations visited was able to measure the real costs, including assessor and management time).

Despite these caveats, 'value-for-money' (another term for efficiency) was claimed by some employers, and for two reasons; commitment and feedback. Accredited training was more 'professional'. But, as with a number of aspects of this project, this was more a statement of faith, than the result of a cost benefit analysis.

5.12 Integration

Whatever the precise value of the benefits of accreditation, the organisations with effective Human Resource Development (HRD) policies claimed that these benefits were enhanced because of the way they fitted in. The full potential benefits were only realised when there was an **integrated** policy. Such a policy, it was claimed, should start with commitment at the highest level in the organisation (possibly also enshrined in a mission statement) and would involve the **exchange** of information on organisational plans and on personal performance and aspirations.

Some information could be, and usually was, provided by a central personnel function. The weakest link was often in guidance, appraisal and help with personal development which involved line managers. Accredited training was, never-the-less, a powerful tool which was having good results, in some organisations, even in the hands of reluctant managers. Where managers were enthusiastic and skilled, and where there was a well integrated corporate strategy, the results were even better.

The adoption of accredited work-based training was clearly extremely demanding and potentially risky. It is not surprising that many of the employers visited had started cautiously, or not at all. The remarkable achievements of those with significant programmes in place (e.g. chemical industry) should be extensively studied. It is too easy to be deterred by perceived 'disadvantages'.

5.13 Disadvantages of Accreditation

There were a number of inhibiting factors; **hurdles to be overcome**. These were not inherent disadvantages, but real enough and painful if not prepared for and taken clearly.

The first is the possibility of failure. Companies, unlike the education system, require 100% success rates. Employees who were assessed to be below a required standard needed to be seen as an indication of the **organisation's** failure to train, not as the **individual's** failure to learn. This is more easily achieved on internal, NVQ-type, assessment than on external certificated courses. (The unpopularity of conventional examinations was very clear).

The second hurdle concerned cost and administration. The explicit, and hidden, costs of accreditation have already been emphasised. The problem was the high **initial** cost of internal, competence-based accreditation involving massive documentation, training of assessors, etc. Like many administrative systems which appear bureaucratic, they may be an essential foundation for smooth, and subsequently cheap, administration. The hurdle was the start-up cost. Until the appropriate infra-structure exists, including details such as new computer software for training records, the costs were inhibiting some employers who did not have well integrated policies.

Such employers were more likely to respond to training needs, and requests, in an ad hoc way. The increasing use of accreditation drew attention to the need for more planning and clearer policies. It involves a shift from **reactive**, task-based training to **proactive** HRD policies. This change of emphasis was illustrated by comments such as accredited training 'lacking relevance' or being 'too theoretical'. Wider relevance and greater understanding, may well be a condition of accreditation.

Employers clearly lose some control over both content and evaluation as soon as national standards are adopted. Training may not only be perceived as less relevant, it will also be less able to respond quickly to new requirements. A clear indication that there will always be a need for training which is **not** assessed in this way.

Time is a factor in another way. Those companies who were using accreditation often mentioned the commitment to selecting, counselling and supporting staff; all demands on the time of both specialist and line staff. This, and the other factors mentioned so far, give a clear indication why it is difficult for smaller organisations to use accreditation. But not impossible, as there were some excellent examples.

The final potential difficulty, or hazard, concerns the consequence of **raising the stakes**. Accreditation offered substantial benefits, but it also raised expectations. If these were unfulfilled, the result could be disillusion. Professional training was planned, and not 'ad hoc'. This was clear. It was less obvious that companies had thought through the situations which might arise when many more staff were being encouraged to develop their full potential and when this potential had been recognised.

5.14 Further Work

This Research into the use of accreditation for work-based training highlighted, in particular, the significance of giving the employee 'ownership' of their own training. This led directly into further development work.

The Department of Continuing Education at Lancaster University is very grateful to the Training, Enterprise and Education Directorate (TEED) of the Department of

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